

Colossians, Installment 1

The book of Colossians was written by Paul, to the church at Colossae. Just as we call people who live in Texas, “Texans” and people who live in New York, “New Yorkers”, people who lived in Colossae were called Colossians.

The ancient city of Colossae has been extinct for nearly eighteen hundred years; Colossae was never a very important city, and by the time of Christ, it had already peaked in importance and been in decline for a few hundred years. The city lived its heydays during the [Persian](#) rule between 6th and 4th centuries BC, but lost its importance after the foundations of [Hierapolis](#) and [Laodicea](#) around 2nd century BC. Then the city was developed in wool production and weaving until it was destroyed by a major [earthquake](#) in the 1st century AD during the reign of Neron. During the late [Roman](#) period Colossae was diminished into a village status due to the immigration to [Hierapolis](#) and [Laodicea](#) cities.

The city of Colossae was in a region then called Asia Minor, but today is modern day Turkey.

- Show maps of modern day Turkey, and historical map

We know that Paul preached for a couple years at Ephesus, about 150 miles away from Colossae. We don't know if Paul every visited Colossae, but it that the church there was founded by Epaphras, rather than Paul. It is estimated that about 25% of the material in Ephesians overlaps Colossians.

Acts 19:1, 10-11 (KJV)

1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:

Colossians 1:7-8 (KJV)

⁷ As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

⁸ Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Colossians 2:1 (KJV)

¹ For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and *for* them at Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

This letter is written by Paul, and is thought to have been written during his first imprisonment in Rome around AD 60 - 62 There are “prison letters” Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon. When Paul was imprisoned the first time, he was on house arrest for two years.

Acts 28:16 (KJV)

¹⁶ And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

Acts 28:30-31 (KJV)

³⁰ And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

³¹ Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Colossians 4:10-18 (KJV)

¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)

¹¹ And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only *are my* fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.

¹² Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

¹³ For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them *that are* in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.

¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.

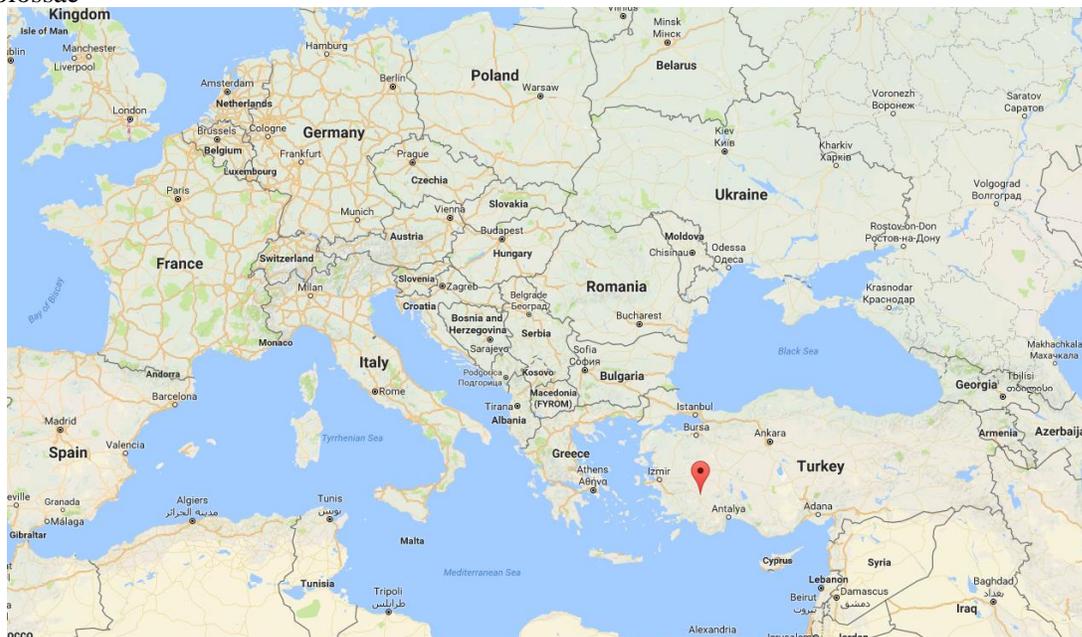
¹⁵ Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.

¹⁶ And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea.

¹⁷ And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.

¹⁸ The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace *be* with you. Amen.

Paul mentions Laodocia and Hierapolis. These are respectively about 6 miles, and 14 miles away from Colossae





- So hopefully that provides a good geographic and historical context for this letter. Notice that Paul remained busy even while imprisoned, doing what he could while on house arrest – preaching, writing letters, and encouraging as many as he could
- We also see that Paul made no distinction between a church he founded and one he did not. He cared for this congregation every bit as much as a congregation he had founded.

OUTLINE

- Introduction (1:1–14)
 - Greetings (1:1–2)
 - Thanksgiving (1:3–8)
 - Prayer (1:9–14)
- The Supremacy of Christ (1:15–23)
- Paul’s Labor for the Church (1:24–2:7)
 - His Ministry for the Sake of the Church (1:24–29)
 - His Concern for the Spiritual Welfare of His Readers (2:1–7)
- Freedom from Human Regulations through Life with Christ (2:8–23)
 - Warning to Guard against the False Teachers (2:8–15)
 - Pleas to Reject the False Teachers (2:16–19)
 - An Analysis of the Heresy (2:20–23)
- Rules for Holy Living (3:1–4:6)
 - The Old Self and the New Self (3:1–17)
 - Rules for Christian Households (3:18–4:1)

- Further Instructions ([4:2–6](#))
- Final Greetings and Benediction ([4:7–18](#))

Purpose of the letter:

Paul never explicitly says why he is writing to the church at Colossae. Perhaps he is writing simply to encourage and instruct this new congregation, but it also possible that he was writing to counter some false teachings or heresies that had begun to crop up in the congregation. Most scholars take the latter view – that Paul is purposeful in choosing the topics of the letter. Paul never names a specific false doctrine, and he does not explicitly describe what the false teaching was, so we must infer it from the letter. Some commentaries call this the “*Colossian heresy*”

Gnosticism

- So what was the Colossian heresy? Most scholars seem to believe that Paul was a common belief at the time called “Gnosticism” which elevated angels, a focus on human knowledge for redemption, and a belief that all religions were a manifestation of one hidden truth, and that through human knowledge, men could find the truth.

Judaism:

- We also know that the early church struggled with judiasers – those who wanted to bring the Christian church back under the old law, subjecting Christians to laws and traditions from the Old Testament, or from traditions of Jews at the time. Embedded in this false doctrine was a focus on salvation by works, as opposed to the Christian truth of salvation by faith.

So whether these false doctrines were in fact making in-roads at the church in Colossae, we don’t know for sure. All we know is what Paul tells us and inferring the reason behind the message is more error prone. But if these false doctrines did exist, we can gain instruction in the way Paul addressed them. Rather than delve into the details of the false religion, he takes a very practical, simple approach of teaching the truth. His comments are positive, not negative. That’s probably a good model for us to follow. There are 1,000 errors, but only one truth. Better to expound on the one truth, and in so doing dispel all 1,000 errors at once, than to fixate on one of the specific errors.

Imagine if Paul wrote a letter to the Church at Albuquerque. He might teach about materialism, and the sanctity of marriage. One could then reasonably infer that the city of Albuquerque, in the year 2017, had a lot of material wealth, and a low respect for marriage, and that perhaps these factors impacted the Christians at the church.

1) Ceremonialism. It held to strict rules about the kinds of permissible *food and drink, religious festivals*
Colossians 2:16-17 (KJV)

¹⁶ Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath *days*:

¹⁷ Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.

This is a key verse, and one that I think we all understand better after Zach’s sermons last week. Much of the ceremonial old law was a shadow of things to come. Christ is the fulfillment of the law. He is the entity casting the shadow. So, there are some aspects of the OT, ceremonial law, which have been fulfilled by Christ, and are now deprecated Paul is reminding the Colossians of this fact, telling them not to go back under the old law.

Circumcision

Colossians 2:11 (KJV) ¹¹ In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

Colossians 3:11 (KJV) ¹¹ Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all.

2) Asceticism. “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”

- Asceticism is a lifestyle characterized by abstinence from sensual pleasures, often for the purpose of pursuing spiritual goals

Colossians 2:20-23 (KJV)

²⁰ Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

²¹ (Touch not; taste not; handle not;

²² Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

²³ Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

So again, Asceticism is not a word that shows up in scripture, but it’s a concept that shows up, and still shows up today. Where does our righteousness come from? Does our righteousness come from “neglecting the body” and following rules, or does it come from faith in Christ, and contact with this righteousness through his blood?

3) Angel worship.

Colossians 2:18 (KJV)

¹⁸ Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

4) Depreciation of Christ. This is implied in Paul’s emphasis on the supremacy of Christ (1:15–20; 2:2–3:9).

Colossians 1:15-20 (KJV)

¹⁵ Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

¹⁶ For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

¹⁷ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.

¹⁹ For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell;

²⁰ And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven.

5) Secret knowledge. The Gnostics boasted of this. The treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ, not man.

Colossians 2:2-3 (KJV)

² That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father,

and of Christ;

³ In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

6) *Reliance on human wisdom and tradition.* .

Colossians 2:4-9 (KJV)

⁴ And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.

⁵ For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

⁶ As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in him:

⁷ Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

⁸ Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

⁹ For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

So I think its reasonable to deduce from these teachings some of the false conceptions and belief systems that Paul was seeking to counter. In any case, our focus is to learn the truth in what Paul actually teaches, not to learn about the belief systems he may be tearing down.

With that in mind, we'll progress mostly linearly through the book, but with three main topics, each of which has some sub-topics

- 1) **The Supremacy of Christ**
- 2) **Freedom from Human Regulations through Life with Christ**
- 3) **Admonition to Holy Living**
 - a. **Old man and new man**
 - b. **Instructions for Christian homes and workers**

In our second installment we'll discuss the Supremacy of Christ. We'll finish this morning's study by reading the introductory comments to the book, which are the first 14 verses.

Colossians 1:1-13 (KJV)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus *our* brother,

Throughout the letter, Paul uses "I" instead of "We" so although he includes Timothy in the beginning, it seems that it really is a letter written by Paul. He may have just meant to acknowledge that Timothy was there with him and supporting him in other ways.

² To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

⁴ Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love *which ye have* to all the saints,

Again, we see that Paul has been praying for this congregation, even though he was not the founder of the congregation. In this way, we see that Paul was not a sectarian, was not seeking a following, not territorial. He was an apostle, and he loved and cared for all Christians.

⁵ For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

⁶ Which is come unto you, as *it is* in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as *it doth* also in you, since the day ye heard *of it*, and knew the grace of God in truth:

Paul's salutations almost always begin with praise and thanksgiving. The one exception I can think of is in Galatians where he skips the pleasantries. Paul considers the church at Corinth to be faithful, and believes that the gospel is brining forth fruit in their lives. He mentions the fruit in verse six here, and also in verse 4, where he mentions the manifest love the Church at Colossae had for all of the saints.

⁷ As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

⁸ Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

This is one of a couple verses that mention Epaphras and leads us to believe it was he, not Paul who first preached at Colossae

The next few verses are Paul's prayer for this congregation. Have you ever said "I'll pray for you" and only meant you'll say "God please help brother or sister X" next time you pray? How about really praying for someone!? Paul really prays for this church at Colossae. He says he does not cease to pray, and then he describes his seven-fold prayer for them:

⁹ For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that

- 1) ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;
- 2) ¹⁰ That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,
- 3) being fruitful in every good work, and
- 4) increasing in the knowledge of God;
- 5) ¹¹ Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power,
- 6) unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;
- 7) ¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son:

Perhaps this should be a model for us in praying for our brothers and sisters:

- 1) To be filled with spiritual understanding and wisdom
- 2) To walk worthy of the Lord (an upright, pure life)
- 3) To be fruitful in good works (good works that flow from a redeemed heart)
- 4) To increase in knowledge of God (moving forward or moving back, but no such thing as standing still)
- 5) Strengthened by the power of God (strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way. Isaiah 35:3. To be strengthened by God, not our own.
- 6) To be patient and longsuffering (but not longsuffering and dour... Longsuffering with joyfulness!)
- 7) To give thanks to God

So next time we'll move on to the real meat of the book, beginning with the topic of the Supremacy of Christ